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Matthew 22, “…when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city..."

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The most defensible reading is that the burning of the city in Matthew 22:7 is a **proleptic** element: it narrates the future destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 as if it had already occurred within the parable. This is not an anachronism in the problematic sense, because parables are not historical timelines; they are symbolic narratives governed by theological and dramatic logic rather than by strict chronological correspondence.

Three considerations support this.

1. Prolepsis is a recognized biblical and prophetic device

Biblical speech frequently uses the “prophetic perfect” or prolepsis, describing a future judgment as already accomplished because it is certain. In Matthew 21:33–45, the parable of the wicked tenants similarly has the owner come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others, even though that judgment lies in the future from the standpoint of Jesus’ ministry. Matthew 22:7 follows the same pattern: the king’s burning of the city is a prophetic foreshadowing of Jerusalem’s fall, cast in story form as something already done.

Thus, from the standpoint of Jesus’ hearers, the burning of the city is proleptic. It anticipates what will happen to the murderers and their city, but the parable presents it as the king’s immediate response to rejection.

2. The parable’s sequence is theological, not chronological

The apparent anachronism is this: if the burning of the city is A.D. 70, then the final invitation to the highways seems to place the Gentile mission after 70. But historically the mission to the nations had already begun before 70, at Pentecost and through Paul’s ministry.

The resolution is that the parable is not giving a calendar of salvation history. Its sequence is:

- invitation to the original guests,
- rejection and murder of the king's servants,
- judgment on those murderers,
- widening of the invitation.

That is a theological sequence: Israel's rejection of the kingdom leads to judgment, and that judgment vindicates the turn to the nations. The "then" of Matthew 22:8 is narrative "then," not historical "then." It means, "Since the first invitees have excluded themselves and been judged, go therefore to all." The final call is not a new post-70 mission; it is the ongoing gospel invitation, now understood as the only valid invitation after the old order has been judged.

3. Parables are permitted to compress and reorder events for effect

Parables regularly telescope time, mix images, and reorder events to make a point. The king in Matthew 22 destroys a city in the middle of preparing a wedding feast, then continues inviting guests. That is not realistic political history; it is parabolic imagery for divine judgment and grace. If every element had to match historical chronology, the parable would collapse into absurdity.

The burning of the city is therefore best understood as a parabolic symbol of Jerusalem's fall, inserted into the story to show that the first invitees are no longer "worthy" (Matthew 22:8) and that the invitation now goes out to all. It is proleptic, not anachronistic in the problematic sense, because the parable is doing theology, not historiography.